

## Güneydoğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi The Journal of South-Eastern European Studies

Research Article

 Open Access

### A Monumental Statue of Zeus From Nicopolis Ad Nestum



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#### Abstract

The statue was very monumental, but unfortunately preserved are only the lower parts of the legs. Until now, the fragment of a monumental statue of Zeus has not been analyzed and commented on. A Greek inscription on the plinthus mentions the family Antonii in Rome and says that the husband has dedicated the statue on the request of his wife. The iconographic type is of the standing naked Zeus: with mantle, scepter, phiale (?), eagle stepping on a thunderbolt. In the article the iconography, style and the origin of the statue are studied. It has the features of a copy of an ideal sculpture from the Late Greek Classic, created by the vision and the traditions of an Italian sculptor in the first three decades of the 2nd century.

#### Keywords

standing Zeus · the family of Antonii · Italian workshops · the cult of Zeus in Nicopolis ad Nestum



“ Citation: Petrova, Svetla, . 2023. 'A Monumental Statue of Zeus From Nicopolis Ad Nestum', *Güneydoğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi-The Journal of South-Eastern European Studies*, 41, pp. 26-37. doi:10.26650/gaad.20230000

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The lower part of a monumental statue has been found probably in the late 80-s or in the beginning of 90-s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1905 captain Nikolov has seen this statue in the yard of the Bishop's residence of Nevrokop<sup>1</sup>. But the statue has a much longer story. According to Theodorite, the bishop of Nevrokop (1903-1907), born in Serres, the statue has been discovered in the river of Mesta (Nestos), lower than the village of Fotovishta (today the village of Ognyanovo) by a peasant, who brought it first to the mansion of Tefic bey in Nevrokop<sup>2</sup>. In 1907 the bishop Theodorite takes it to Drama and finally the statue was brought to Sofia and exposed in the central hall of the National Archaeological Museum, with Inv. No 5733. Until now, the fragment of a monumental statue of Zeus has not been analyzed and commented on.

We have enough grounds to consider that in fact the place of finding was not the river Mesta (Nestos in Antiquity), but Kanina river, the left feeder of Mesta, because namely Kanina is flowing in immediate proximity southeastern of Fotovista (now Ognyanovo). At the same time Mesta is relatively far, about 3km southwestern of the ancient Nicopolis and more of 4km away from Ognyanovo (**fig. 1**). It can be supposed that the bishop born in Serres and moving to Nevrokop only 1903, didn't know well the exact data and circumstances of finding the monument. These were the reasons for mixing up the bed of Kanina River with that of Mesta therefore it is necessary to consider that the statue in fact has been found in the riverbed of Kanina, not of Mesta.

From **the monumental statue** is preserved only the lower part (**figs. 2 – 6**). It is erected on almost oval plinthus, being one whole with the statue itself, is thicker at the right side and thinner at the left one and at the rear (**fig. 2**). The right leg is preserved almost till the middle of the hip, leaned to the support in the form of a log. In the upper part of the preserved hip, there is a sign, which was carved later – tally, denoting the digit five; and on the same height, of the log, are visible the letters O and D M Z (?) which are unclear.

The foot of the left leg is preserved, raised on the platform with wedge-like form (**fig. 3**). The general height of the preserved part of the statue is 0.95m. The postament of the statue is a plate with an ellipse-like form, thin 0.10m at its left part, max length 1.03m and width 0.55m. The right foot is 0.35m long; the height of the leg from the foot to the knee is 0.55m; the width of the calf of the preserved right leg is 0.48m. A small protrusion next to the left leg is marking the place where the end of the scepter, held by Zeus in his left hand, was touching the plinthus. Other protrusions on the small finger of the left leg and on the ankle show that Zeus had a mantle over his left shoulder, falling and reaching them both, with several vertically wrapped small folds. A representation of an eagle stepping on a thunderbolt is shown right of the statue.

The pose of the legs demonstrates the traditional for the late classicism chiasm: the weight of the body is falling on the right slightly inclined leg, while the left one is put aside, a little bit behind and unburdened. Following some well-preserved statues with chiasm, we can imagine that the upper part of the body of the statue from Nicopolis ad Nestum was depicted with the same specific curve. The fingers of both feet are of the Greek type, the main finger longer and being divided from the rest ones. The muscles of the calf, the knee and the bones are very precisely sculpted and very well polished. The rendering is not mild, but rather on the boundary to be constructive and formal in a very academic way. Only the fingers of both feet are not accurately shown, but treated in a more sloppy and schematic way, where the volume has almost disappeared and only marked.

The eagle is slightly turned to the left, aside of the statue, with slightly, but not fully opened wings, the left wing a little bit higher than the right one (**fig. 4**). The head of the bird is missing, the feathers shown one by one in a relatively high relief and in details. The strongly erased legs are standing on the thunderbolt. It is represented very schematically, as a twisted and fastened in the middle bundle of short ropes. Its ends fall chaotically from both sides of the twisted and dense middle part, serving as a base for a stand of the eagle. From the right back side of the statue the volume is more angular and schematic in comparison with the front.

<sup>1</sup>Николов 1911, 159. Nevrokop, today is the modern city of Gotse Delchev

<sup>2</sup>In 1894 the mansion, together with the statue have been purchased to serve as a building of the Bishop's residence.

The rear of the statue is smooth, not so well and slightly polished and schematic, without details, except one nub of the log and two round incised configurations (**fig. 5**). They are not occasional and maybe signify other two nubs of the log, marked only as outlines and never continued and finished. In the Roman art we know a lot of examples of "non finito", especially at the rear of the monuments. The way of rendering of the rear demonstrates that the statue was installed against a background and only the front should be observed and partly the back sides, but not the rear. The hollow in the center of the cut upper surface of the log with lead inside, shows that the log used to be higher than now and consisted of two parts, joined together by two lead configurations or even a lead stick, connecting both parts. Now we cannot state categorically if this was intended from the very beginning or it was a later repair. In our opinion more probable is the second supposition, because the log was not too high and there was enough material for it in the initial marble block. After it has been broken accidentally, maybe during the transportation, it was repaired in the described way.

The plinthus has been made together with the statue from the same block. But it was put most probably on a second, this time more solid pedestal in the form of a solid block. Some of the parts, for instance the log, and supposedly the arms and the head, were made separately by several parts, later joined in situ, which was a usual practice in Roman sculpture, including smaller and monumental pieces.

The canon of this statue can be supposed as 1:7 (the head and its relation to the general height). Since the right leg to the knee is 55cm (without the plinthus), the general height may be about 2m 20cm at least. In all cases the place of finding is not the original one and it was moved later, probably after the accepting of Christianity as official religion by Constantine the Great and especially at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

The pose and the attributes (eagle, scepter and thunderbolt) show that the monumental statue represents the main deity of the Olympian gods, Zeus. This is proved also by the Greek inscription<sup>3</sup> in two lines on the front of the plinthus (**fig. 6**). According to the bishop Theodorite, the inscription has been seen and read for the first time by some French archaeologist, identified as Paul Perdrizet<sup>4</sup>, who published his partial reading in 1906. The inscription says: Quintos Antonios Fondanos dedicated (the statue) to the Lord Zeus on the request of his wife<sup>5</sup>. The god is named in Greek as κύριος Δία. Despite the Greek language, the Roman names of the dedicator may probably relate to the very famous patrician family of the Antonii in Rome, known since the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC, using the prenomen Quintus and Titus<sup>6</sup>. The Antonii are witnessed in the province of Thrace with M. Antonius Zeno in 148, as consul (suff.), Legatus Aug.pr.pr., at the emperor Antoninus Pius<sup>7</sup>. Other representatives of the Antonii established in the province have also left epigraphic proves in Greek from the territory of Topeiros (Kosmiti)<sup>8</sup> in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and in Abdera from the same period, or generally during the imperial period<sup>9</sup>.

The missing name of the wife is not a usual phenomenon and supposedly can be explained by her local Thracian or even Greek origin and previous lower status in comparison of that of her husband. It is likely that the husband was a member of the governing elite in Nicopolis ad Nestum and very rich, since he could afford a monumental statue. His cognomen Fondan/Fontan, coming from *fons* (fount, source), probably can relate to his duties (?) to the water supply of the city, which possessed abundant thermal and fresh waters.

<sup>3</sup>Гергов 1961, 348, № 58; IGBulg 1966, 2340

<sup>4</sup>Perdrizet 1906, 225.

<sup>5</sup>Κ(οίντος) Ἀντώνιος Φονδᾶνος τὸν κύριον Δία κατὰ αἴτη[σι]ν γινεκὸς αὐτοῦ ἀνεθηκα. The translation of the inscription into Bulgarian is made by N. Sharankov, to whom I express my gratitude.

<sup>6</sup>The genus of the Antonii is famous with its first representative since 450 BC, namely Titus Antonius Merenda (Liv., III, 35 (9). Except the patrician wing, the Antonii have also a plebeian one, connected with Marcus Antonius (Klebs 1897, 92-109). It is known that the patrician wing has often named its heirs the prenomen Titus and Quintus: *Quintus Antonius Merenda, tribunus militum consulari potestate* in 422 BC: Liv., IV, 42 (2).

<sup>7</sup>With coins minted in Perinthos, Philippopolis and Nicopolis. See: Klebs 1897, No 733

<sup>8</sup>Parissaki 2007, E 99, E 100.

<sup>9</sup>Parissaki 2007, E 483, E 25.



Having in mind the dimensions of the monument and its monumentality, we suppose, that the original place should be somewhere in Nicopolis ad Nestum itself. Because of the great financial possibilities of his Roman family, Quintos Antoninos Fondanos was the ktetor of the main cult statue of the temple or sanctuary of Zeus in the Roman city.

The iconography represents him nude, similarly to Zeus from Ince Blundell collection in Liverpool<sup>10</sup>, dated in the time of the emperor Hadrian, i.e. **standing naked type of Zeus**. The god is depicted standing up with a scepter. This type is represented in Graeco-Roman iconographic traditions where Zeus is standing with a scepter in his left hand and a thunderbolt in his right or the opposite. The eagle is next to his legs, either the right or the left one. The specific, in this type, is the presence of a mantle which is thrown over his left shoulder and was falling, reaching the ankle and foot of the left leg, like folds<sup>11</sup>. The eagle, the thunderbolt, the traces under the supposed scepter and the pose of the legs with the falling on the left leg mantle (see **fig. 3**), shows that the statue from Nicopolis was **of the type of standing naked Zeus/Jupiter with scepter and phiale (?)**<sup>12</sup>.

There exist several close **parallels** for the statue of Zeus from Nicopolis ad Nestum. In some cases, as the remnants from Ephesus<sup>13</sup> show, we can observe only the feet of the god and of the eagle, but the way the god is stepping is different – with both flat feet and without putting the left leg so strongly behind (**fig. 7-left**). An identical composition had also the relatively small in dimensions statue of Zeus from Perinthos, on an un-profiled plinthus. The left leg is put strongly backwards and unburdened; the right one is weighted and is leaned on a log. At the bottom to the right, an eagle is depicted with slightly opened wings<sup>14</sup>. Except Zeus, often Neptune<sup>15</sup> is shown in the same pose but leaning on a dolphin (**fig. 7 right**). Another similar monument is the statue of Zeus from Cyrene, which depicts him nude, with aegis over the left shoulder (**fig. 8**). The statue from Cyrene is a copy of the original of Leochares from circa 370-360 BC, reaching to us due to the sculptor Zenion from Aphrodisia<sup>16</sup>, who was working in Cyrene during Hadrian.

It is one possibility that Zeus in our case is also leaning to the log not only by his right leg, but as well as putting the right hand on the log. Although with small preserved parts, the remnants of the statue from Nicopolis, over the leg, point to the presence of a mantle over the left shoulder. That data defines the statue as the type of Zeus with a mantle/himation, thrown on the left shoulder, similarly to the monumental statue of Zeus Brontaios<sup>17</sup> from the museum of Prado (**fig. 9**). But in our case, the mantle is falling very low, touching in some parts of the fingers and the ankle of the left leg. In his probably raised left hand he was holding the scepter, while the right one has been slightly lowered towards the log, likely holding a phiale (?) in it, similarly to the also standing but dressed statues of Zeus in Altes Museum, Berlin<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>10</sup>From Rome, Tivoli, Hadrian's villa. Roman imperial copy, restored. Ashmole 1929, 3-4, No 2, Pl.12; LIMC VIII 1997, 338-340 and 339, No 195a (See: Iphigenia Leventi, Classical period II: 4<sup>th</sup> cent.B.C. – in LIMC VIII/1, 1997, 338-346).

<sup>11</sup>The type "Schultermantel". See Bauchhenß / Noelke 1981, 376-378; determined three main types; Bauchhenß in LIMC VIII/1, 1997, 479-481, where the author specifies the typology and defines nine types, which are also based on different ways of wearing the mantle (in the monuments of *peripheria occidentali*).

<sup>12</sup>The iconography of Zeus standing, nude, with scepter and phiale and also with thrown over the shoulder himation are often met during the Roman imperial period. See LIMC VIII/1, 1997, 350-354 (Pavlina Karanastassi, Römische Kaiserzeit, LIMC VIII/1, 1997, 350-356).

<sup>13</sup>Aurenhammer 1990, 25-26, Taf. 3 a-c.

<sup>14</sup>The statue is made from Proconesian marble and is also part of the exhibition in the museum in Tekirdağ (observations of the author). The presentation of the toes is close to the presentation of the statue in Nicopolis and too different from the one in Ephesus. The statue of Zeus in Perinthos was made in Greek canon, replica of the ideal sculpture from the Late Classical/ Early Hellenistic original.

<sup>15</sup>This iconography, with the described pose and adequate attributes is very close to the iconography of Poseidon/Neptune, with a trident in the left hand and a mantle over the left shoulder, which nevertheless does not reach to the ankle and the fingers of the left leg. See the colossal-type statue of Neptune/Poseidon from 135 AD, Roman copy of Licinius Priscos from a Greek original in Prado Museum. It was at Palaemon's sanctuary in Isthmia (near Corinth), where it was described by Pausanias (II, 2, 1); an important sample of Roman Empire's classicism. See: Schröder 2004, 421-425, Taf. 25; Kat. Prado II Nr. 193 and cit.lit.

<sup>16</sup>Squarciapino 1943, 35-39, tav. IX – Zeus Egioco di Zenion; Squarciapino 1983, 74-87; LIMC 1997, 339-340, No 195b, Museum of Cyrene, Libya, period of Hadrian. Another statue from Leiden – standing Zeus with aegis and an eagle at the bottom right, next to a log, made from Paros marble, 166 cm in height. See: Bastet, Brunsting 1982, 7-8, Pl. 4, No 18 (18. H II BB 8); LIMC 1997, 432, No 117a.

<sup>17</sup>Partly restored – the left shoulder with the mantle; part of the right leg with the support. The representation of the eagle is missing. The colossal statue is dated in 80-100. IMC 1997, 340; Schröder 2004, 366-370, Kat. Nr. 180 and cit.lit. This statue and the statue of Zeus from Cyrene are considered as Roman copies of an original from the Late Greek Classic.

<sup>18</sup>LIMC 1997, 348, No 261 and cit.lit.

The position of the free from the scepter arm can be different. In one case it may be turned down, in another case he can hold a phiale in it. It is difficult to reconstruct the positions of the missing arms, with the attributes in them. The diverse possibilities are typical for the combinatorial essence of the Roman art, in which the strict copies of the Greek and Hellenistic originals are rarer than the variations and imitations. The statue of Zeus in Prado reveals the possibility the head of the eagle in Nicopolis ad Nestum to be turned to the left towards the god, while the body slightly points to the opposite side. Other statues of the standing Zeus with a thrown mantle over the left shoulder, can be seen also in the Gallery of the Capitoline Museums<sup>19</sup> and in Louvre<sup>20</sup>.

The style and the rendering are not the typical for the Greek and Asia Minor cult sculpture. The stylistic treatment is typical for the Early Antonines, especially for the first three decades of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. It still bears the features of the classical volume, space, harmonic proportions 1:7, but not so mild, as in the period from late Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius.

Compared with the Greek sculptures of Athens, Corinth and Asia Minor, the statue of Zeus is quite different from them and from the examples of Aphrodisian masters. We know the production of Aphrodisia thanks to the historical data and the signed works of Zenion, Licinius Priscus and of an anonymous Afrodisian sculptor, probably Flavius Chryseros, and Flavios Zenonos in Ny Carsberg Glyptothek, Copenhagen, with their un-profiled plinthes<sup>21</sup>. At the same time, in the cult production of Italy, the plinthes are not profiled, similar to our case, the treatment is not so mild, the volume is not so 'Greek', but more academic, arid and more "Roman" in its essence.

The **analysis of the statue from Nicopolis**, the gathered for it parallels, show us the deity standing and nude with thrown mantle over the left shoulder, which was falling to the left ankle. In his left raised arm Zeus was supporting/ holding a scepter. In his right, slightly lowered to the log, hand he was holding phiale (?) and an eagle next to his right leg, standing on a thunderbolt with its head turned towards the god. Such iconography of the type "*standing naked Zeus, with mantle over the left shoulder, with scepter and phiale (?)*", represented with all of Zeus's attributes is unknown and unique for now.

The Greek inscription on the plinthus of the statue of Zeus from Nicopolis ad Nestum reveals only that it was made in situ in a local Thracian-Greek milieu of culture, and that the origin of its master (quadratararius/a stonemason) may be different from the origin of the sculptor. The marble is grey-whitish, with small sugar-like crystal structure, also different from all the known marbles coming from the quarries around Nicopolis ad Nestum, Parthicopolis, on Thassos, etc. The marble, the style and the treatment points rather to an Italian manner or to a West Balkan workshop under the influence of the Italian sculptural production. We can suppose that Quintus Antoninus Fondanus, being of Italian origin, had the necessary connections with such Italian or Italian-like workshops and paid for an imported cult statue of Zeus, installed in the temple or a sanctuary of Zeus in Nicopolis ad Nestum itself. The next possibility was that the statue of Zeus, dedicated by Fondanus, decorated some building or the agora of the city, without direct connection with a temple or sanctuary.

Although the inscription does not supply with concrete data about the function of this statue, a few more arguments can be used for proving the cult function of the statue of Zeus. The first one is its monumentality and the very good quality, not typical for Nicopolis and its territory according to the known monuments so far. Unlike the big cities as Philippopolis, the big size denotes cult usage in smaller provincial cities. One more monument supports such an interpretation. P. Perdrizet has published a second monument, found also in Nicopolis ad Nestum<sup>22</sup>. It is a marble base

<sup>19</sup>Capitoline Museum, Cat. No Rome MC0282, the height is 162 cm, roman copy of Greek statue, standing with scepter (missing) in left hand and a cup in right, with an eagle to his right. Dated in the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> C. See: Jones 1912, 40, No 41 (Pl. 6); LIMC 1997, 433, No 119.

<sup>20</sup>Jupiter, circa 150 AD. From Paros Marble, discovered in Italy. Musée du Louvre-Lens, Galerie du Temps (2013). Purchased in 1807, formerly in the Borghese collection (MR 254, the height is 234 cm). See: Louvre – Lens, le guide 2013, 118-119.

<sup>21</sup>Squarciapino 1943, 38; Squarciapino 1983, 74-87; LIMC 1997, 433, No 121; anonymous, probably Flavius Chryseros; 350, No 283 and *ciy.lit*.

<sup>22</sup>Perdrizet 1906, 225-228; IGBulg 1966, No 2341.



with an inscription of a not preserved statue/xoanon of Zeus, with the same names of the god. We have the monumental cult statue of Zeus, erected by Fondanus and a votive (sigil) to the same deity by another person.

We believe that the dedicator has arrived in Nicopolis soon after the settlement has been re-organized and raised in rank to a Roman *politia* of eastern type. The presence of Quintus Antonius Fondanus in Nicopolis ad Nestum may relate to the organization of governing, planning and foundation of the city's structures, which have begun in the first decade of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. He started a family here with a Thracian or a Greek woman of prominent origin, but in all cases lower than his own. It is underlined in the inscription that the statue was made by her request and he only fulfilled it. The statue was ordered in Rome or to workshops working in the Roman style. The iconography of Zeus, especially the stylistic and the sculptural treatment, as well as the peculiarities of the plinthus and the cutting of the log, point to some Italian or West Balkan ateliers, rather than those in Greece and Asia Minor; the manner of the first ones was familiar, nearer and preferable by Quintus Antonius. The underlined and clearly distinguished muscles, the separating of the calf from the shin-bone by arrow-like incised line is typical for the Italian and close to them workshops, copying or making replicas of the ideal sculpture of the Late Greek classics and Hellenistic period in the Roman imperial period<sup>23</sup>.

It should be stressed that usually in the region and generally in Thrace the temple or the sanctuary inside the Roman cities and outside them are dedicated both to Zeus and Hera. But in Nicopolis ad Nestum the deity is only Zeus. Maybe this is a continuation of an older pre-Roman tradition of the cult of Zeus in Thrace under the influence of the Greek culture, which Fondanus has supported and continued, due to the probable Thracian or Greek origin of his wife. In fact, she was the initiator of this act of ordering and donation of the unusual monumental statue of Zeus in Nicopolis ad Nestum. We see a typical syncretic phenomenon in the religion and culture of Southwestern Thrace: an Italian of high social status, who makes a dedication, following the local Graeco-Thracian cult tradition; the statue is made in a Roman manner and by Italian or close masters, with the syncretic Graeco-Roman iconography, in the first three decades of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

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Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Conflict of Interest	The author has no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

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<sup>23</sup>For this enormous branch of scientific research see in details M. Koleva, Римска идеална скулптура от България, София 2017, with numerous references concerning this theory.



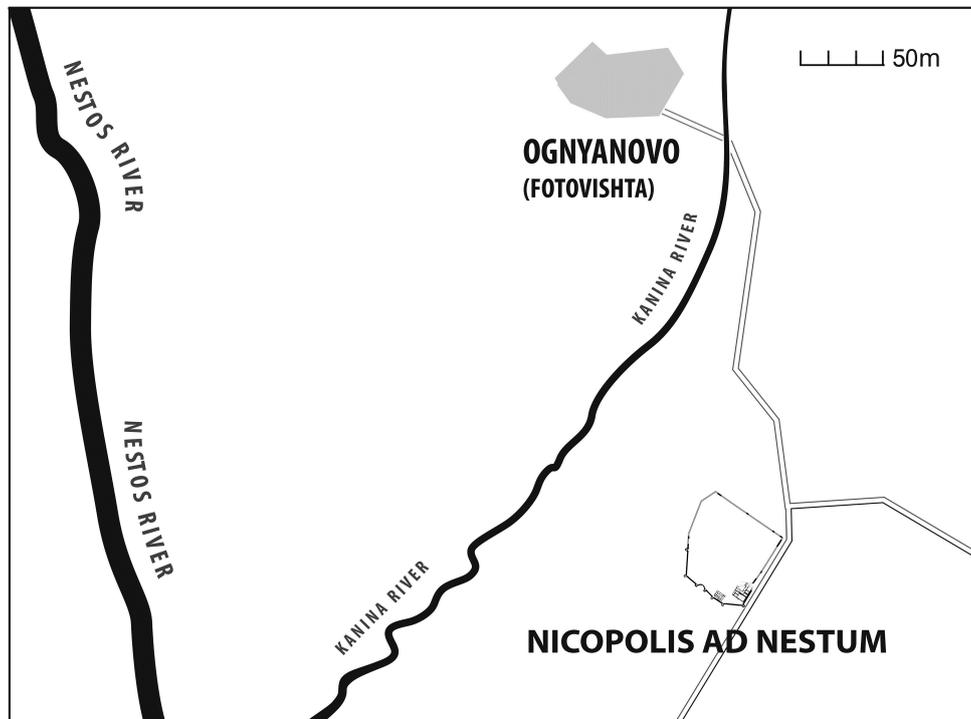
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## Appendix

**Figure 1**

A map of the region – Nicopolis ad Nestum – the village of Fotovishta (modern Ognyanovo) – the rivers Nestos and Kanina.



**Figure 2**

The statue of Zeus from Nicopolis ad Nestum.



**Figure 3**  
*The legs, details.*

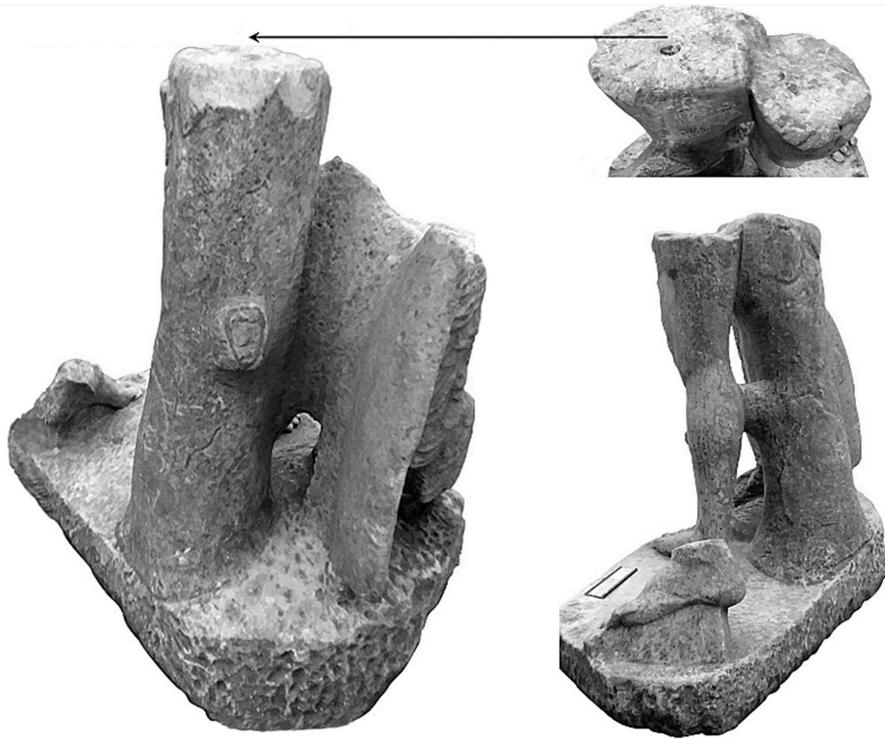


**Figure 4**  
*The eagle and the thunderbolt, details.*



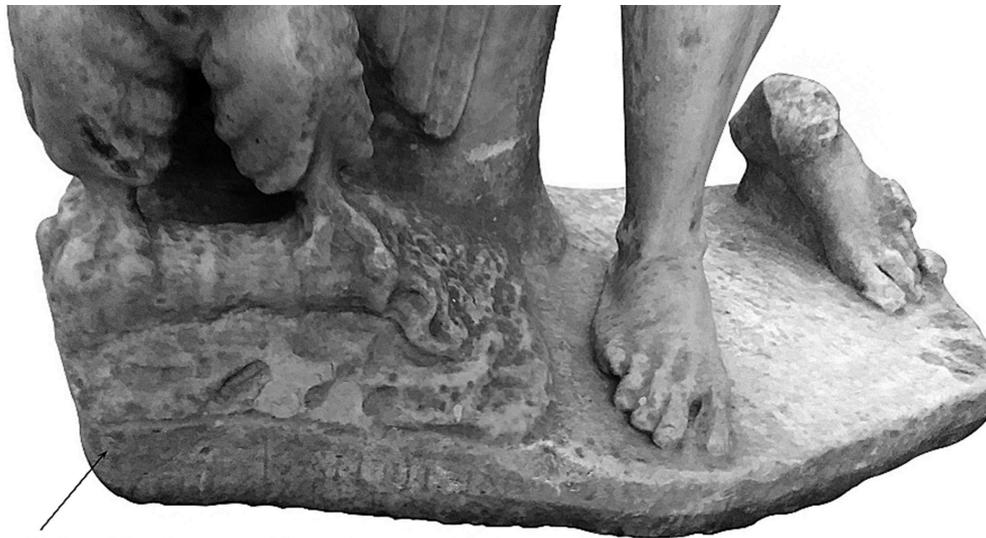
**Figure 5**

*The rear side of the statue, the log with a hollow in the center, details.*



**Figure 6**

*The plinthus with inscription, detail.*



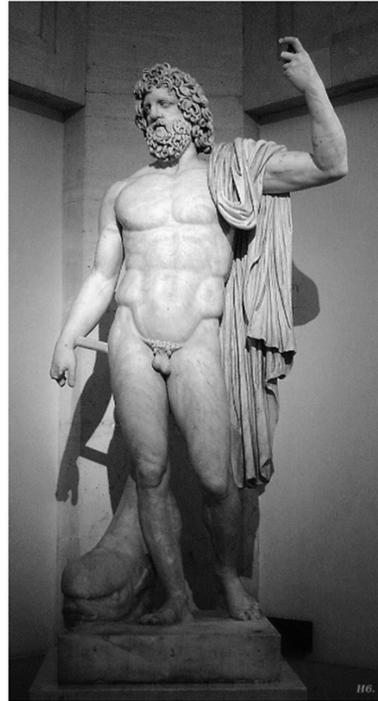
Κ(οίντος) Ἀντώνιος Φονδᾶνος τόν κύριον Δία  
κατά αἴτη-

..  
[σι]ν γινεκός αὐτοῦ ἀνεθηκα

... ..

**Figure 7**

*The remnants from Ephesus (left). The statue of Neptune. Madrid, Prado Museum (right).*



**Figure 8**

*The statue of Zeus from Cyrene (left).*



**Figure 9**

*The monumental statue of Zeus Brontaios. Madrid, Prado Museum (left).*

